

Family Learning Event Guide

Staging a Successful
Family Learning Event



ncfi[™]
National Center for
Families Learning

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About NCFL

The National Center for Families Learning (NCFL) is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to helping adults and children learn together. NCFL creates and deploys innovative programs and strategies that support learning, literacy and family engagement in education. From the classroom to the community to the digital frontier, NCFL collaborates with educators, advocates, and policy-makers to help families construct hotspots for learning wherever they go. For more information on NCFL’s 25-year track record, visit www.familieslearning.org.



Overview of Family Engagement

Outside of the instructional environment, family engagement is one of the most important factors impacting student success. The benefits of family engagement in education are even more acute for vulnerable populations including, but not limited to, low income and ethnically diverse families that are disenfranchised by education systems (Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007). Schools and community organizations can maximize the benefits of family learning opportunities by building parent capacity through a National Center for Families Learning (NCFL) approach known as Parent Time. Parent Time is a forum for parents that is specially focused on building their skills. It also is evident that when families engage in learning through NCFL’s innovative Parent and Child Together (PACT) Time® approach, academic, attendance, and prosocial behaviors are improved (Levesque, 2013; Jacobs, 2004). PACT Time involves families learning together. It gives parents an opportunity to use specific strategies that they learn during Parent Time. This Guide is designed to help schools and community-based organizations host successful family learning events centered on PACT Time as a critical piece of an effective school or community-based family engagement system.

Effective family learning events provide support that helps parents and children learn together through observation, discussion, reading together, play, and reciprocal teaching. By providing parents with the information and the skills they need for an effective PACT Time, family learning events following the NCFL model bolster parents’ confidence in their ability to learn with their children in both online and offline environments. This is particularly true when working with vulnerable families. Parents set clear goals and adopt strategies for reaching those goals. Family learning events should be planned according to the needs and resources of parents, schools, and community-based organizations. Events should be hosted as collaborative efforts designed to boost student achievement through increased parent engagement.

“Family engagement is one of the most important factors impacting student success.”

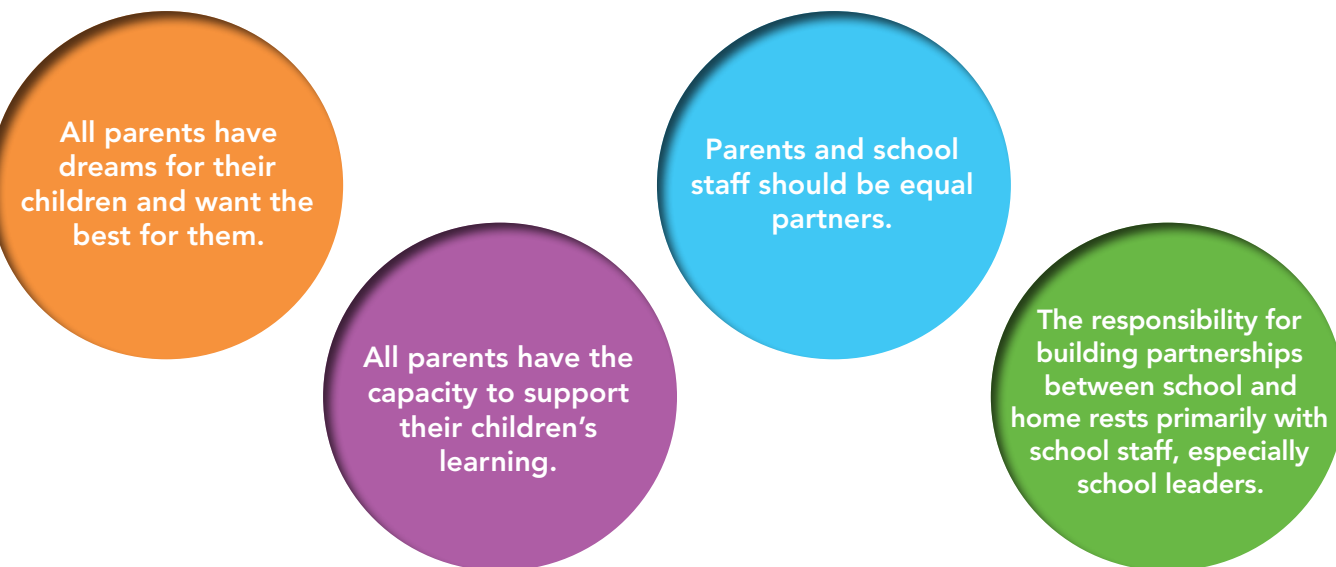
It should be noted that when we use the word *parent* throughout this document, we are referring to a very broad category encompassing the primary caregiver of a child.



In terms of working with low income families in general, funds distributed through Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act can be used to leverage family learning events as the required annual meeting and flexible meetings as desired throughout the year. Title I funds can be used to support these meetings in general and also to fund support services such as transportation, child care, and home visits. Title I required topics related to school improvement; academic standards; and the planning, review, and improvement of the school parental involvement policy can be covered during family learning events. In addition, family learning events can provide a forum for the communication of ways parents can work with their children to improve their academic achievement through literacy training and the use of technology.

This Guide is designed to assist schools and community-based organizations in their efforts to host successful family learning events that link formal classroom learning to out-of-school time environments. All of the factors that determine success for family learning events are based on the following four core beliefs organizations must have about parents if they truly want to partner with them.

Core Beliefs



(Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007, pp. 28-39)

The Purpose of Family Learning Events

Family learning events are designed to provide positive PACT Time experiences for parents and families in the school or community setting in order to support children's success in school. They are an effective way to engage families directly in efforts to encourage PACT Time in the home, school, and community. Family learning events contribute to family engagement goals by providing parents and families with an opportunity to participate in hands-on, intergenerational learning experiences that can help transfer learning to the home. In addition to building parents' skills for PACT Time, family learning events are also great forums to share information with families on topics to enhance children's learning and school achievement. These topics may include the following:

- ✓ PACT Time process, strategies, and modeling
- ✓ Parent skill building for use in the home or community
 - Literacy skills
 - Numeracy skills
 - Use of digital resources
 - o Wonderopolis®
 - o Family Time Machine™
- ✓ Family goal setting
- ✓ Relevant learning for participants
- ✓ Children's learning styles
- ✓ Curriculum and pedagogy
- ✓ The importance of parent involvement in schools
- ✓ Behavioral expectations
- ✓ Other topics required by Title I and other federal or state laws
 - School improvement
 - Academic standards
 - Parent leadership opportunities



Family learning events increase the engagement of parents and send the message that educational organizations are places for families. Research confirms that parents are more likely to learn together with their children when they know what their children need in everyday life, including school life, and when parents know what is necessary for success in school (Jeynes, 2011). Family learning events are most effective when implemented within an overall family engagement system.

Increasing Attendance at Family Learning Events

There are several important things to consider in addition to the academic needs of students and families when planning family events. In addition to providing families with high quality, relevant PACT Time activities, there are specific practices that have been shown to encourage families to attend family learning events (Hutchins, Greenfeld, & Epstein, 2008).

Meals. Since the majority of family learning events are held after parents return from work, the school or community organization should provide dinner or a healthy snack for the families that attend. Businesses or other partners may be willing to donate dinner for well-planned, goal-oriented events. Planning committees must ensure that there is enough food for all participants who register to attend.



Student Performances. When students perform a song, dance, dramatic reading, poem, debate, or other literacy-linked production, parents are more likely to attend.

Active Engagement. Family learning events must actively involve all participants in completing activities, sharing comments, participating in discussions, and celebrating students’ successes. More parents will attend if family learning events are informative and enjoyable.



Publicity. It is essential to inform families about an upcoming family learning event in ways that can be understood easily. Sending home attractive flyers and adding events to the daily announcements help increase excitement among students. Events also can be promoted through educationally appropriate social media, telephone calls, e-mails, school blogs, or websites. The planning committee also should identify groups of parents who may need a personal phone call or translator. When parents receive information and reminders about an event, they are more likely to attend. Invite a parent leader to help advertise the event in the community.



Incentives. Prizes or giveaways also encourage participation in family learning events. These can include raffles, door prizes, and free books for students who attend. Incentives, especially those linked to students’ success in school, add purpose to the evening and show participants that their attendance is appreciated.



Child Care. When schools expect parents to attend an evening event, it often is necessary to provide child care. The planning committee should arrange for and train adult or teen volunteers to watch and work with toddlers of parents who are attending family learning events with their school-age children. When planning for child care, it is important to have activities outlined for volunteers to use with each age group.

Assembling a Team

One important way to maximize the impact of a family learning event is to make it a collaborative effort. This process should include ideas from educators, parents, students, and other members of the community. It should be clear from the very beginning who the leader for the group is so that plans are followed and the night is a success. The team should then begin a plan based on the current needs of the students and families.

What you need to know when assembling a team:

- Which staff members are available to help with the planning?
- How will PACT Time and building parents’ skills be infused throughout?
- What goals do both parents and the hosting organization have in mind?
- Which community members/agencies can assist?
- Are there parent volunteers or members of parent groups who can help?
- Are all of the right stakeholders at the table?
- What other resources would be helpful for a successful event?

Start the planning process by reviewing data from family engagement surveys and considering what your school has already done. If you have hosted family events before, identify which components you would like to replicate (what worked) and which things need to be changed in order to address both parent and program goals (what did not work).

Information should be available to answer the following questions:

- What topics are the most beneficial to children and families?
- What do you want parents to know?
- How will the information be linked to increased school achievement?
- What materials will be needed?
- Who needs to be involved?
- What kind of support is needed (child care, transportation, food)?
- How will the event support overall educational strategies?

Developing a Plan

When developing a plan, think about all of the data that have been gathered from the family engagement surveys and consider best practices. How can you use the information to plan your family event? Make sure that the plan includes the opportunity for families to learn a new skill, discuss the skill, and then practice it within the context of PACT Time. Consider a student performance for the event to draw families in. If parents have access to technology, consider asking them to bring their own device (cell phone, tablet, laptop) to use during the event as appropriate. Designate time to help families practice using technology to support what they are learning. Time can be set aside for parents to network as well. An implementation checklist, which is also a useful tool for planning, follows.



Family Event Implementation Checklist

Logistics

Task	Who	By When	Status	Notes
Room reservation				
Room set up (chairs and tables arranged to encourage conversation, display table)				
Snacks or meals				
Distributing announcements and making follow-up contact with parents				
Child care for siblings arranged if needed				
Transportation set up if needed				
Materials (handouts, welcome signs, prizes, name tags)				
Preparing for parents with special needs				

Family Event Plan

Task	Who	By When	Status	Notes
Outline of event has been distributed so that everyone involved knows what to expect				
All materials are ready for presentation				
Facilitation strategies support adult learning styles				
Evaluation of event is prepared (parent survey, follow-up discussion)				
Parent sign-in sheet is ready				
Event opening/closing planned				
Hosts/Guides know the plan and are ready to greet families				

Event Follow-up

Task	Who	By When	Status	Notes
Reflect on what went well and what could be improved				
Thank you notes sent when appropriate				
Post pictures to school website and social media				

Advertising for Family Events

- Start advertising for the event at least two weeks before it will take place.
 - Ask children to create flyers/invitations to send home to their families.
 - Include notices of the event in the classroom newsletter.
 - Post the event on the school website, calendar, and school sign.
 - Post the event on social media sites.
 - Use a banner.
 - Make phone calls or send text messages.
 - Mention the event to parents at dismissal.
- Make sure that advertisements are clear, provide enough detail for families, and are translated where needed.

Family Event Agenda

Sample agendas for family events are included in the next few pages in the Guide. They should prove helpful as you plan your family learning event, but remember to think about your families and their needs and goals and adjust the sample agendas to better serve their purposes.

Family learning events can be planned for the length of time that best fits the needs of the parents and the school/community. Many events last between 1 ½ and 2 hours. When creating an agenda, remember to allow time for parents to arrive and become comfortable with the environment and time for a closing at the end of the event.

Sample Agenda — Literacy-Focused Event

- Parent Arrival** (10-15 mins.)
- A staff member should be available to greet families as they come in and escort them to the event. Also, direct parents to sign in and make them feel comfortable as they wait for the event to begin.
 - If families are able to bring their own devices, provide instructions for connecting to Wi-Fi and navigating to the site or application that will be used.
- Welcome** (5 mins.)
- The workshop leader or designee greets the parents and welcomes them. Messages should highlight that both parents and teachers are important partners in the success of children.

- Student Performance/Ice Breaker** (10-15 mins.)
- Provide an icebreaker activity that is related to the overall theme or concept of the workshop. This activity is designed to let parents get to know you and each other.
 - If students are performing, inform parents where to go to view the performance.

- Whole Group Activity** (20-30 mins.)
- Share information about the event in an interactive way. Vary the use of sharing strategies and audio-visual equipment—PowerPoint, discussion, video clips, charts, handouts, small group work.
 - Model or demonstrate the interactive literacy activity or strategy for the entire group. The goal is for parents to be able to replicate the activity or strategy later in the event, and then ultimately at home with their children.
 - Allow time for discussion or questions about the activity prior to the break.

- Small Group Sessions** (20 mins.)
- Families should be given the opportunity to practice the activities/strategies modeled by presenters.

- Large Group Sharing** (20 mins.)
- Families are given the opportunity to share the strategies they practiced and how it went for them.
 - Discuss any questions or concerns parents have about carrying out the strategy.
 - Families share their plan for using the strategy/activity at home.

- Closing** (5 mins.)
- Summarize the event for families.
 - Make connections to home.
 - Provide materials for families to use at home.
 - Ask parents to complete the evaluation form and ask for suggestions for topics for future sessions.
 - Provide certificates for families.
 - Incorporate food at this time.



Sample Agenda — Preschool Family Event

Welcome and Introductions (5 mins.)

- Staff will welcome parents, make introductions, and review the plan for the evening.
- The welcome message will highlight that both parents and teachers are important partners in the success of their children.

Student Performance (15 mins.)

- Students will dramatize the story that has been selected for the event.
- Teachers can guide the planning of this performance by familiarizing students with the story, and practicing their parts prior to the event.

Whole Group Activity (15 mins.)

- A designated teacher will demonstrate interactive reading strategies using a book that was selected for the event.
- Review the goals for the event and highlight the importance of interactive reading strategies.
- Explain the layout of the remainder of the evening to parents, answer any questions, and release them to their activity stations.

Small Group Sessions (30-40 mins.)

Families will be given the opportunity to rotate through activity stations led by teachers.

1. Interactive Shared Reading

- Share the importance of how interactive shared reading is a highly effective way for parents to build a child's vocabulary and cognitive abilities.
- Demonstrate the strategy for parents and provide them with something to take home (bookmark or handout) that outlines the strategy and gives suggestions for what to do at home.
- Give parents the opportunity to practice interactive shared reading strategies that were introduced during the whole group activity and reinforced during the small group demonstration.

2. Drama

- Share that dramatic play is a great way to help children understand the power of language. When children participate in dramatic play, they are learning to choose words to communicate what they want to say, listen to what others have to say, and respond appropriately. This process helps children make the connection between spoken and written language. Their vocabularies will grow as they begin to use new words. These skills will later help them learn to read.

- Demonstrate ways to bring literacy to life through dramatic play, allowing families opportunities to engage in the activities with staff.
- Give parents time to practice using the strategies with each other.

3. Activity Cards

- Provide activity cards for families outlining ways to encourage language and literacy learning every day, everywhere. Activities could include expanding language, sharing stories, rhyming, alphabet knowledge, emergent writing, and making their own books.
- Ask families to create their own book to practice a strategy from the cards.

4. Story Retelling

- Explain how story retelling supports comprehension, vocabulary, and language.
- Have families use sequencing cards and/or puppets to help retell the story that was read in the large group.
- Have a staff member available to discuss strategies for using retell at home.

Large Group/Closing (15 mins.)

- After families rotate through activity stations, an educator or designated leader will thank families for coming and explain the take-home materials.
- Staff will be available to answer any questions from the group.
- Names will be drawn to distribute raffle items, and families will be directed to the cafeteria for the planned meal.

Sample Agenda — Wonderopolis® Family Event

Family Arrival (10 mins.)

Welcome families as they come in. Have a space designated for parents and a separate place for students. Explain that students will participate in activities separate from their parents while parents receive information for the event, and that they will come back together to participate in activities as a family later on in the event.

Welcome and Introductions (5 mins.)

Welcome parents and thank them for coming. Explain the outline of the event.

- Parents will participate in Parent Time to learn about using Wonderopolis with their families.
- While parents are participating in Parent Time, a separate space will be available for children with activities related to the theme of the event.

- Once Parent Time is finished, parents and children will come together to participate in PACT Time as a family. Parents will have the opportunity to share what they have learned and explore some activities with their children.

Parent Time (30 mins.)

Introduction

- Build rapport and break the ice, ask parents how they currently use technology with their children, how they respond to questions their children ask, and what activities they do at home as a family.

Opening Activity

- Demonstrate how to go to the Wonderopolis website: wonderopolis.org.
- Point out that each Wonder has:
 - An image and a video
 - Information about the Wonder question
 - A comprehensive quiz and Wonder Word challenge
 - Suggestions for related activities in the Try It Out section
 - A way to search for other Wonders — by entering a topic or keyword into the search bar
- Share information about the site: Wonderopolis is a place where natural curiosity and imagination lead to exploration and discovery for learners of all ages. Brought to life by the National Center for Families Learning (NCFL), the Wonders of the Day® help you find learning moments in everyday life—ones that fit in with dinner preparations, carpool responsibilities, a stolen moment between breakfast and the bus, or within school and learning programs.

Central Ideas and Practice

- Have one of the suggested Wonders of the Day available for parents to view and demonstrate how Wonderopolis can be used at home. For example, use Wonder of the Day #316: Why Do You Have to Go to Bed Before Dark? to start a conversation about how much sleep is needed so that you can be well-rested for the next day. The Try It Out section of the Wonder of the Day provides tips for getting a good night's sleep that will benefit the entire family. Provide parents with a handout that they can use with their children to document how much sleep they are getting as a family.

Application

- Guide parents in discussing how to use Wonderopolis with their children. Help parents role play introducing their children to the website.
- Encourage parents to preview Wonders in advance and visit a Wonder multiple times with their child—they can learn something new each time. During one sitting, they may want to look at the image and watch the video. Another time they may want to use the audio tool to listen to information. Follow up by doing some of the Try It Out activities together.

Closure

- Ask parents what they wonder about. Suggest that these ideas can be submitted to Wonderopolis for possible inclusion in a future Wonder of the Day.
- Explain that parents will now join their children to explore Wonderopolis as a family. Stations will be set up with Wonders to explore, including activities that go along with the Wonder.

PACT Time/Breakout Sessions (30 mins.)

Families will rotate through the following activity stations. A staff member should be available to help at each station. As they explore each Wonder, parents can share what they learned in Parent Time with their children.

1. Build a Simple Rocket

Have the following materials available for families:

- Computer to view the suggested Wonder
- 1 ball of string at least 30 feet long
- 1 plastic soda straw
- 1 roll of masking tape
- 1 pair of scissors
- Several balloons
- 1 measuring tape
- 1 ball-point pen

Show the Wonder of the Day #1145: How Do Scientists Explore the Solar System?

Invite families to build a sample rocket by following the instructions below.

- Thread one end of the string through the drinking straw. Attach it to something stable, like a curtain rod or a heavy piece of furniture. Be careful that no one trips over the string.
- Have someone inflate a balloon and hold the air inside without tying it. While someone holds the other end of the string taut, attach the balloon to the straw with the masking tape.
- Release the air from the balloon. Measure and record the distance it moves.

Wonderruptions: Will adding more air to the balloon before releasing it make your rocket go farther or not as far? What will happen if the string is held loosely instead of taut?



2. Growing Beans in a Bag

🌱 Have the following materials available for families:

- Computer to view the suggested Wonder
- Bean seeds
- Paper towels
- Plastic bags
- Ruler
- Water
- Observation sheet

🌱 Show the Wonder of the Day #487: Do All Plants Have Roots?

🌱 Invite families to plant beans in a bag to take home and observe.

- Place a moist paper towel in a clear, clean plastic bag. Then place the bean seeds between the bag and the moist towel.
- Place the plastic bag near a window or tape it to the window. The bean seeds must receive sunlight for the germination process to occur. Observe germination over several days.
- Create a chart with day, measurement, and observations on it. Record the changes you see each day.
- Wonderuptions: What changes do you notice each day? Which appears first: the root or the shoot? What do you think would happen if you used different types of seeds (ex. corn, sunflower seeds)?

3. Use Chemistry to Clean Money

🌱 Have the following materials available for families:

- Computer to view the suggested Wonder
- Old pennies (approximately 10 for each solution)
- 3 clear cups
- Water
- Dish soap
- Salt
- Vinegar (or lemon juice)

🌱 Show the Wonder of the Day #186: Why Do You Need to Wash Your Hands?

🌱 Invite families to use chemistry to make money clean.

- Fill the first cup with plain tap water and add ten pennies. Next, fill the second cup with water and dish soap and add ten pennies. Next, fill the third cup with a ½ cup of vinegar and 2 teaspoons salt and add ten pennies.

- After five minutes take out five pennies from each cup and compare. (Set aside the pennies from the vinegar and salt cup – DO NOT rinse.) After ten minutes take out the rest of the pennies from the cups. Compare the results.
- Rinse the second set of pennies taken out of the vinegar and salt solution. Compare these pennies to the unrinsed pennies taken out earlier.
- Wonderuptions: What solution cleaned the pennies the best? Why do you think one solution worked better than another? What happened to the unrinsed pennies from the vinegar and salt solution? What other solution might work to clean pennies?

4. Bridging the Canyon

🌱 Have the following materials available for families:

- Computer to view the suggested Wonder
- 20 gumdrops per family
- 40 round toothpicks per family
- 1 paper cup per family
- Pennies (or other weights)
- Books – enough to make two stacks

🌱 Show the Wonder of the Day #236: How Long is the Longest Bridge?

🌱 Invite families to build the strongest bridge they can using gumdrops and toothpicks.

- First, sketch different designs you can use to build a bridge. Try using triangles, squares, and other shapes as the basis of your blueprints.
- Test your bridge design by placing it across the two stacks of books 10 inches apart. Does it hold up with no added weight? Use the paper clip to hook the cup to the center of the bridge. Add pennies to the cup to test the strength of the bridge. Record your results in a chart.
- Repeat using different bridge designs.
- Wonderuptions: Which polygon shape will help you build the strongest bridge?

Large Group Sharing/Closing (15 mins.)

- 🌱 Ask families to share their experiences with Wonderopolis.
- 🌱 Answer any questions families have.
- 🌱 Provide suggestions for additional Wonders to explore at home.
- 🌱 Thank families for attending the workshop.

Conclusion

This Guide should serve as an outline for hosting family learning events that build parenting skills and provide PACT Time strategies within the context of an overall family engagement strategy. Consider your organization’s families and their needs when determining the content and structure of your event within this framework. The best practices covered in this Guide paired with content driven by your organization’s unique needs will provide a strong foundation for family events.

Take some time and look through the section that follows. It provides valuable information on PACT Time and building relationships with parents. Both are essential in creating successful family learning events.

Resource Information

The Importance of Parent and Child Together (PACT) Time®

NCFL defined Parent and Child Together (PACT) Time early in the organization’s life and has subsequently tested its implementation among diverse parents and children—from preschool through elementary school—across the United States for more than 25 years. Throughout this journey, PACT Time has been consistently affirmed as an essential strategy to maximize the benefits of families learning together. Whether in the context of a comprehensive family literacy program, a family engagement program, or as stand-alone activities designed to model family learning in the home, school, and community, fidelity to the PACT Time model can deepen the impact of family learning events. Support for structured and purposeful dual- and multi-generational learning approaches rests firmly on an expansive research base drawing from the domains of parent engagement, parent self-efficacy, dual- and multi-generational approaches to learning, and family literacy. NCFL defines PACT Time as a deliberate attempt to structure family learning using the five components of an effective PACT Time experience: Planning, Preparation, Experience, Debriefing, and Transfer to Home, Community, and School. Activities can include families coming together to work, play, read, learn, engage in interactive media experiences, and volunteer.



Bringing It All Together for a Successful Family Learning Event

Family learning events are an effective way to engage families directly in efforts to encourage PACT Time in the home, school, and community. Family learning events contribute to family engagement goals by providing parents and families with an opportunity to participate in hands-on, intergenerational learning experiences that can help transfer learning to the home.

Connecting With Families

Establishing Relationships with Families

There are several considerations to make when establishing relationships with families. First, it is essential for educators and community partners to understand that all parents and families care about their children’s education and have goals for them to succeed. Considerations for establishing relationships should include the level of complexity and style of communication with families, whether or not translation is provided in the home language when necessary, and the cultural appropriateness of different types of communication. With more and more diverse families gaining access to technology, concerted efforts should be made to use technology as a way to build relationships with families and to foster relationships between families.

Next, several different types of communication methods should be utilized when building relationships with families—these may include sending home weekly newsletters, posting on available websites, parent-educator communication notebooks, e-mails, phone calls, text messages, social media, parent focus groups, letters home, and in-person meetings. Information should be clear and concise, culturally and linguistically appropriate, and include pictures or graphics for visual appeal.

Once effective relationships with vulnerable families are established, educators should ask families to express what their goals are for themselves and their children. This can be accomplished in several ways including, but not limited to, parent surveys, small group meetings, home visits, parent events, community events, educationally appropriate social media, open houses, and parent-teacher conferences.

During these interactions, educators should listen to the needs of the parents and facilitate their setting of goals. Educators will then have the opportunity to support families by having ongoing conversations about their children through follow-up visits, meetings, social media, or other consistent communication.

Once parents have set goals for their children, educators can help support the attainment of those goals. During this process of helping parents achieve goals that are important

“When parents feel like the relationship is equal, they are more likely to trust the educator and implement the PACT Time strategies shared at a family learning event.”

to them, the strength of the parent-educator relationship grows and paves the way for building effective parent skills that lead to more effective family learning opportunities. Family learning events are an effective forum for demonstrating PACT Time strategies for use in the home and community.

Although the responsibility of establishing connections with families lies with the education staff, the relationship between the school or organization and families should be a truly equal partnership. When parents feel like the relationship is equal, they are more likely to trust the educator and implement the PACT Time strategies shared at a family learning event.

The following self-assessment tool can be useful when evaluating current family and community engagement practices.

Family and Community Engagement Self-Assessment

Questions	Current Practices
How are we involving families as partners in the learning process of their children?	
How are we presenting information to families and community members?	
How are the diverse experiences, interests, and abilities of families considered when planning programs and school activities?	
What current practices have had a positive impact on family and community relationships?	
How are we identifying and supporting families at risk of not engaging with the school?	
What opportunities, resources, and materials are made available to families and the community to enable them to participate in discussions and activities related to student learning?	
What connections have been made with the community? How have those connections been used for developing programs that support student and family learning?	
How are parents' voices included in the planning of family events?	

Open Doors

Strong connections between home and school increase the success of the planning process for family engagement. When parents feel welcome in the classroom at all times, they are more likely to support teachers and provide feedback. As part of relationship building ahead of a family learning event, educators should have ongoing conversations with families using multiple methods, such as phone calls, text messages, educationally appropriate social media, classroom visits, conferences, and home visits. Educators can also invite parents into the classroom to observe day-to-day activities or engage in PACT Time in the classroom (Jacobs, 2004). Preparing parents for PACT Time in the home, school, or community can occur during family learning events. Effective PACT Time includes collaborative planning, preparation, and debriefing between parents/guardians, educators, community partners, and students to give the family opportunities to engage in learning together. Activities can include families coming together to work, play, read, learn, engage in interactive media experiences, and volunteer.



Scheduling

One of the most important factors to consider when engaging vulnerable families in events is scheduling. Families are busy with work, school, and/or parenting issues that make scheduling a challenge. Consider offering events and conferences at a variety of times to allow parents who are not available during the normal school day to stay involved. If times that work for families include meal times, then hosting programs should highly consider providing a nutritious meal. Parents should be surveyed periodically to determine which times work best for them, and schedules for family learning events should be created accordingly.

“Even when young children spend most of their waking hours in child care, parents remain the most influential adults in their lives.”
(Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000, p. 226)

Partnerships

Family, school, and community factors all impact a child’s learning and development and should be coordinated to provide high-quality experiences for each child. There are many ways to engage families through partnerships, several of which are outlined in the six types of parent involvement framework below. For each type of parent involvement listed, there are suggested best practices, each one with different expected results.

Six Types of Parent Involvement Framework

The Six Types of Partnerships Framework provides a common thread of understanding for schools, families, and community partners. The common categories of partnerships are:

1. Parenting: Help all families establish home environments to support children as students.

Provide suggestions for home conditions that support learning at each grade level.

2. Communicating: Design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and children’s progress.

Create opportunities for parents to receive report cards with their children, including conferences on improving or maintaining grades.

3. Volunteering: Recruit and organize parent help and support.

Survey families annually to identify available talents, resources, and times convenient for volunteers.

4. Learning at Home: Provide information and ideas to families about how to help students with homework and other curriculum-based activities, decisions, and planning.

Provide parents with calendars outlining activities for families to do at home or in the community. A sample calendar can be found at <http://30days.familieslearning.org>.

5. Decision Making: Include parents in school decisions, developing parents as leaders and representatives.

Create networks that link all families with parent representatives.

6. Collaborating with the Community: Identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development.

Provide information on community activities and resources that link to learning skills and talents, including summer programs for students.

(Epstein et al. 2009)

Family learning events are an effective way to engage families directly in efforts to encourage PACT Time in the home, school, and community. Family learning events contribute to family engagement goals by providing parents and families with an opportunity to participate in hands-on, intergenerational learning experiences that can help transfer learning to the home.

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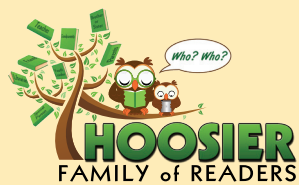
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Cultivating Readers Event Guide



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